

# Tales recall newspaper pioneer

By SANDRA WALTERS  
The Post-Record

In May 1887 the town of La Camas, Wash., finally had its happenings gracing the pages of a local newspaper that was started on a small budget but left a large impact on the area.

The La Camas News was started by John H. Ginder in 1887 after he married Florence Cowan, of Camas.

According to the couple's daughter, Ruth Ginder Freeman who still lives in Camas, her parents met on a river boat excursion up the Columbia River.

Florence's father, Richard T. Cowan, operated a general merchandise store in La Camas, developed the Cowan Addition by Forest Home and was active in community affairs.

But before Florence and John met, Ginder was learning the newspaper business through his job as a "printer's devil" (a printers errand boy or apprentice) on the Columbia Churchman when he was 16 years old.

"Father went to school in Vancouver," Freeman said. "But he went to work early and got involved in newspapers."

During the early days on the Columbia Churchman, Ginder made \$2 a week. A year later he began working for the Vancouver Independent and got an increase in salary — \$5 a week and the following year he got a raise that took him up to \$9.

It was while he was a printer's devil that Ginder learned the ropes of the trade and became an expert typesetter.

Ginder was born June 7, 1857, near Pekin on the Lewis River on his parents', William and Louisa Ginder, land claim. His parents had come to the area from Ohio.

After beginning the first newspaper in La Camas, Ginder stayed with it for a couple of years before going to work in the paper mill.

"I will always remember what Father used to say about starting the paper in Camas," Freeman said. "He'd say, 'It didn't take much to start a newspaper in those days. I had a secondhand press, a job press and a few fonts to type.'"

In 1895 the Ginder family moved to Stevenson and when the opportunity to purchase the White Salmon Enterprise arose, Ginder and his family moved to White Salmon for six years.

In 1909 the family moved back to Stevenson and Ginder took over at the Skamania County Pioneer where he

became the owner and editor of the newspaper.

It was also during his time as the operator of the Skamania paper that he served as county treasurer, was on the city council and made extra money on the side marrying couples.

Freeman said she doesn't remember everything about her father's newspaper businesses because she didn't think to ask at the time.

"I was a kid and kids don't always listen to their elders," Freeman, 86, said. "He bought them, newspapers, his entire life, right up until he retired and came back to Camas."

One of the things Freeman does remember very well is the fact that the family did a lot of walking.

"We didn't own an automobile or a horse, so we walked everywhere," she said smiling. "There would be quite a gang of us when we went somewhere."

Freeman, born in 1907 in White Salmon, said her and her four brothers and three sisters all got a chance to learn about the newspaper business.

"We all used to go in and learn the trade," Freeman said. "We were all printer's devils and all had the chance to work at the paper."

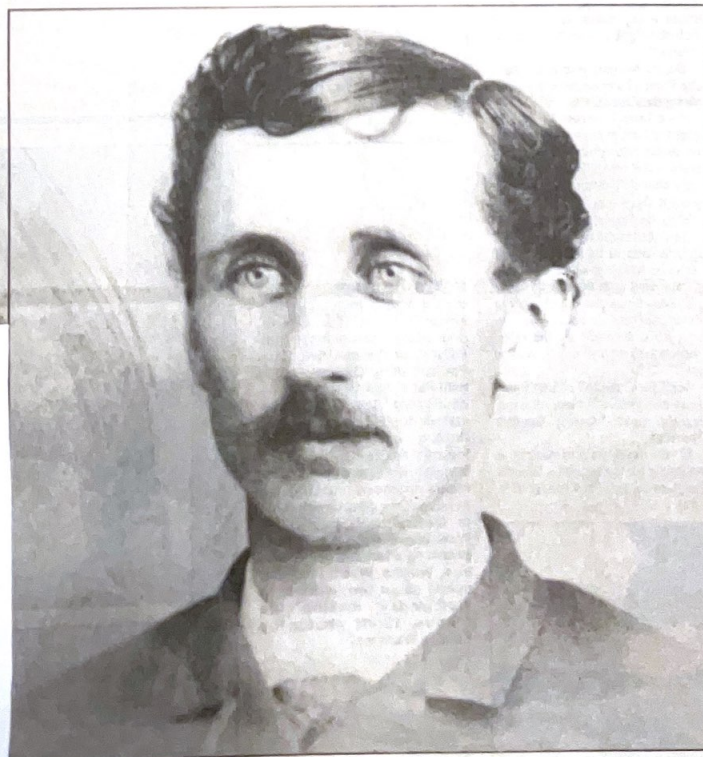
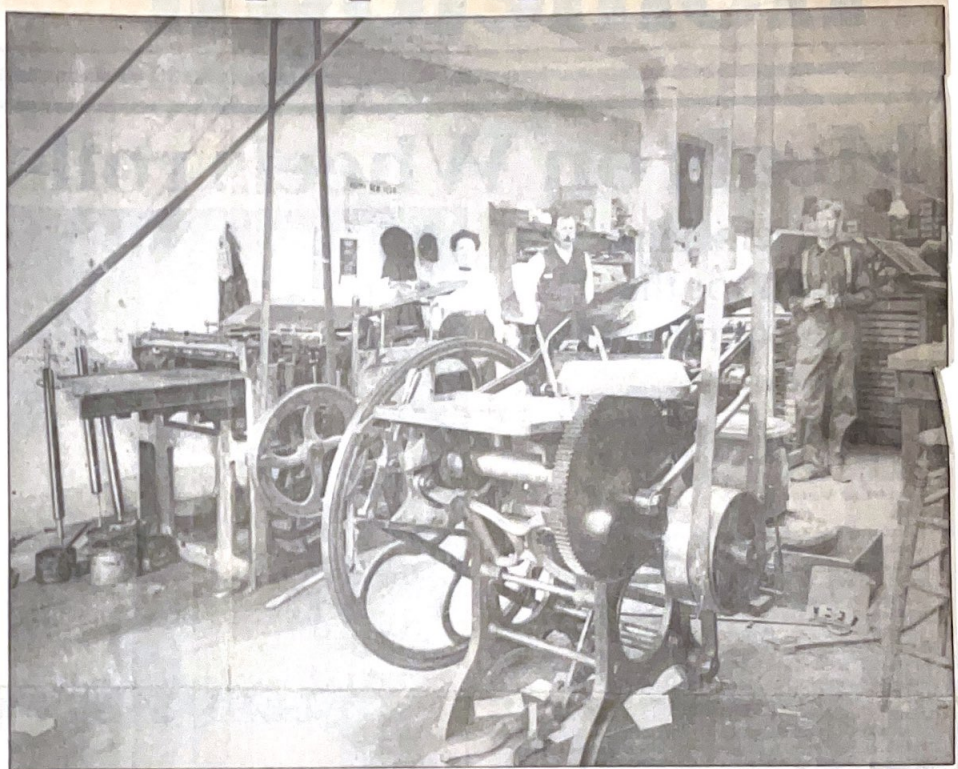
Freeman, the youngest of the family, said she used to run the job press and feed paper into the big press. Freeman said her mother also worked in the office about once a week to send out the bills, but since there were so many children, she stayed at home a lot.

"Father sold the Skamania paper when I was 15 and moved back to Camas," she said. "But, we all learned something about the newspaper."

After her father sold the business and they moved back to Camas, he worked at various jobs until he finally retired. In 1937 he contracted pneumonia and died at the age of 79. He is buried in the IOOF Cemetery in Stevenson.

His wife, Florence, remained in Camas until her death on Nov. 11, 1942. She is buried in the family plot in Stevenson.

Freeman has lived in Camas since moving back when she was 15, with the exceptions of traveling and living in Panama with her husband, Ted, while he worked on the canal in 1941 and 1942. Aside from children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Freeman and her sister, Vera Ginder Troy, are the surviving children of the first newspaper man in La Camas.



RUTH GINDER FREEMAN

WHEN JOHN GINDER arrived in the Camas area in 1887, with his new bride Florence Cowan Ginder, and began the La Camas News, Camas' first newspaper. Although he only had the Camas paper for a short time, Ginder was responsible for running several newspapers in the Gorge. Ruth Ginder Freeman, Ginder's youngest child, said all eight of her parents' children learned about the newspaper business. In 1909 Ginder took over the Skamania County Pioneer paper, where he was the owner and editor. The family (above) is shown in the Pioneer office, from left to right are Florence, Ruth, John and Ralph Ginder. (Photos courtesy of Ruth Ginder Freeman and Sally Alves)